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News Items from the School of Education of the University of Chicago

INVESTIGATIONS OF HIGH-SCHOOL SUBJECTS

The reorganization of high-school curricula has involved the careful investigation of the content of the course of study. One subject after another has been studied critically for the purpose of determining current practices and needed reforms. This movement has been reflected in a very large way in the scientific studies which have been pursued during the past year by graduate students in the Department of Education.

A survey of English as taught in the junior high schools of the North Central Association was made by Ira H. Welch, A.M. The materials examined in this investigation were the language and grammar textbooks used most frequently. These were analyzed to determine their content and method of attack. Additional data were secured from a questionnaire which was sent to every junior high school in the North Central Association. The study showed that 93 per cent of all pupils are devoting one-fifth or more of their time to the study of English. The tendency is to emphasize minimum-essential and functional phases of the subject wherever grammar is taught. Oral compositions receive more attention than written compositions and are frequently preparatory to written work. The class books and outside reading books which are used conform largely to the list recommended by the Committee on Literature of the North Central Association. It is very interesting to note that 13.25 weeks each year are devoted to literature, 12.13 weeks to composition, and 5.5 weeks to spelling. The growth of libraries is noteworthy in view of the fact that at least 70 per cent of the schools studied have recently reorganized their libraries. It is only through genuine reorganization along this line that high-school children can be supplied with appropriate reading materials.

The reorganization of the teaching of civics and other social subjects has been challenging thoughtful consideration during the

last five years. T. D. Brooks, A.M., recently completed a detailed study of present practice in civics-teaching as indicated by textbooks and other teaching materials. Mr. Brooks analyzed the prefaces, contents, and exercises of ten widely used textbooks, magazine reports of exceptional teaching, and current-event studies issued by three widely used weeklies, for indications of aims and for types of pupil activity which are utilized in realizing various aims. The results of the study are very interesting and suggestive. They also suggest the need of genuine reform in several directions. The dominant aims, as indicated by the proportion of exercises, are: (1) the mastery of text materials; (2) judgment and attitude on civic questions; (3) concreteness and correctness of general discussion through the use of local facts; (4) acquaintance with and the ability to report differing views as given in well-organized forms. Negligible attention is given at the present time to skill in the use of primary sources of facts, official reports, and other references of a similar character, or to training in methods of checking the records of officials. Observations and excursions are for the purpose of motivation rather than for information and skill. The most noticeable omissions revealed by the study were in the field of current events.

Glen W. Warren, A.M., recently analyzed eight textbooks of high-school physics and fourteen manuals to determine the content of current courses in physics. The investigation revealed a striking similarity in the content, arrangement, and method of presentation contained in textbooks. The manuals, on the other hand, differ greatly in all these respects. There is doubtless need of careful and deliberate studies of the purposes of laboratory work and, in addition, there is need of the preparation of manuals or directions for this phase of instruction in physics which will secure more effective results. It is interesting to note that two textbooks and three manuals make special provision for individual differences. This has not been done to any appreciable extent in the older texts and manuals. The persistence of mathematics in physics courses is revealed by the fact that approximately 53 per cent of the questions which are asked require mathematical treatment and 75 per cent of the laboratory exercises involve considerable measurement.